

As we all know, schools are hampered in carrying out the mission that they have because of constrained operating budgets and aging infrastructure and ever-increasing energy bills.

In 2005, I introduced the School Building Enhancement Act after learning that energy bills were the second highest expenditure of schools after personnel costs, and I am pleased to say that that legislation has been incorporated in this bill before us today.

The bill will provide \$6.4 billion for school construction. For New Jersey that means an estimated \$125 million to build and modernize local schools. Most importantly, of course, it will allow States to provide the technical assistance to local educational agencies, local schools, to develop energy-efficiency plans and look at their carbon footprint.

So I want to thank Chairman Miller and Representative Loeb sack for carrying this bill forward. There is no question that the economic downturn has put added pressure on our schools from a year ago when we considered similar legislation.

I am also pleased that the chairman has included my language to allow veteran-owned businesses to have contracting preference, along with small, minority and women-owned businesses.

This is a good bill. I encourage my colleagues to support the bill.